The Central Government has taken a series of steps under the National Mineral Policy, 1993 including legislative amendments for facilitating private sector investment including foreign equity participation in the mineral sector. The Central Government has also issued guidelines for grant of large areas for prospecting. Further, the Central Government has allowed automatic route for foreign equity participation upto 50% in case of mining of iron ore, manganese ore, etc. besides certain non-metallic minerals. Higher equity participation can be allowed on case to case basis subject to the provisions of law. The difficulties pointed out in the news items are mainly covered in the agenda items taken up for discussion during the Conference of State Ministers/Secretaries of Mines and Geology held on 26th and 27th December, 1996 under the aegis of Ministry of Mines. A Committee under the Chairmanship of Secretary (Mines), Government of India with some State Secretaries of Mines and Geology, Secretary General, Federation of Indian Mineral Industries etc. has also been constituted to review, inter-alia, the existing procedures pertaining to grant of mineral concessions and to suggest measures to reduce delays in this regard at different levels. The Government has also been interacting with the investors in the mining sector with a view to identify their difficulties and solve them through detailed interaction with the State Governments. Geological data about mineral deposits investigated by Geological Survey of India (GSI) is available for sale at GSI sale counters.

[Translation]

Purchase of Cranes

2160. PROF. PREM SINGH CHANDUMAJRA:
PROF. AJIT KUMAR MEHTA:
SHRI SURENDRA YADAV:
SHRI SANAT KUMAR MANDAL:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government have concluded a deal recently for purchasing the Cranes having capacity of 140 tonnes;

(b) if so, the number of Cranes and the price at which these Cranes are likely to be purchased and the name of the firm alongwith the country with whom this deal has been concluded;

(c) whether it is a fact that the Cranes of the same capacity can also be manufactured in the country;

(d) if so, the reasons for importing these Cranes from a foreign firm;

(e) whether the tenders were also received from other firms of the foreign countries; and

(f) if so, the names of such firms?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Order has been placed for 8 nos. Cranes @ Deutsche Marks 2.95 million (approx. equivalent to Rs. 6.91 crores) Free on Board per Crane on M/s Mannesmann Demag Fordertechnik AG Gottwald/Germany.

(c) Yes, Sir. Jamalpur Railway workshop is in the process of development of manufacturing similar cranes.

(d) Since the technology of these Cranes is yet to be developed indigenously and there is an urgent need for cranes as an accident relief equipment especially in converted routes, these 8 cranes are being imported to meet immediate requirements.

(e) Yes, Sir.

(f) In view of urgency, a limited tender was issued to 2 firms. The other being M/s Cowans Sheldon/U.K.

[English]

MTNL-Profit

2161. SHRI I.D. SWAMI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Comptroller and Auditor General has observed that the MTNL has understated its profit for the year ending March, 31, 1996 by Rs. 109.10 crores;

(b) if so, the details of the CAG's observations; and

(c) the reaction of the Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Audit has observed that understatement of profit has taken place to the extent of Rs. 137.16 Crores on account of the depreciation policy and other matters and overstatement of profit to the extent of Rs. 28.06 Crores resulting in a net understatement of profit to the extent of Rs. 109.10 Crores.

(c) Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited Management has explained in detail the various points to CAG and have arrived at an ultimate figure of Rs. 0.39 crores of the overstatement of profit.

Child Labour

2162. SHRI BANWARI LAL PUROHIT: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether a seminar on child labour was organised by V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, Noida recently; and

(b) if so, the details of the discussions held in the seminar and outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM): (a) and (b) A seminar on child labour was organised by the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, Noida, on 27th January, 1997. It was attended by the Chairpersons and Project Directors of the National Child Labour Projects, NGOs, trade unions, employers organisations and the

representatives of ILO and UNICEF. The important recommendations made in the seminar included, inter alia, health checkup of all children attending special schools, introduction of appropriate vocational stream in the special schools, proactive role by trade unions in the elimination of child labour and effective enforcement of child labour related laws in the child labour endemic areas.

[Translation]

Shortage of Post Offices in Bihar

2163. SHRI JAGDAMBI PRASAD YADAV: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is shortage of post offices in the rural districts, particularly in Godda, Jamui, Banka, Devdhar and Dumka of Bihar and a demand is being made again and again to open more post offices in these districts;

(b) whether STD facility has not been provided so far in Patharganwan, Poreyahar Blocks in Godda, Chakai and Sono district headquarters etc. in Jamui district despite telephone facility already in existence there;

(c) whether effective steps have not been taken so far in this regard despite the assurance of the Government; and

(d) if so, the reasons therefor and steps proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) There is no shortage of Post Offices in the rural districts of Bihar particularly in Godda, Jamui, Banka, Devdhar and Dumka. The percentage of Gram Panchayat Villages covered by Post Offices in these districts as against the national average indicates that the postal network in the Gram Pancayat Villages in these districts compares quite favourably with the national Postal network in Gram Panchayat Villages. Details are given below:

Name of District	%age of Gram Panchayat Villages with Post Offices
Godda	55.68
Jamui	71.00
Banka	70.00
Devdhar	47.00
Dumka	57.54
National	50.00 %

There is, however, demand for opening more Post Offices in these districts.

(b) STD facility has already been provided at Patharganwan, Poreyahat and Chakai. STD facility at Sono is proposed to be provided during 1997-98.

(c) and (d) Does not arise in view of (a) & (b) above.

[English]

Introduction of EMU Trains in Kharagpur-Tata Section

2164. SHRI RUP CHAND MURMU: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware of the hardships being faced by the people of Kharagpur-Tata section of South Eastern Railway due to inadequate passenger services;

(b) if so, whether the Government are considering to introduce more EMU trains in this section;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI SATPAL MAHARAJ): (a) The existing services are by and large adequately catering to the traffic on the Kharagpur-Tata section. However, there are periods of extra rush.

(b) and (c) There is no such proposal at present.

(d) Operational and Resource constraints.

[Translation]

Irregularities in Expanaion of Telecom. Facilities

2165. SHRI K.D. SULTANPURI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any irregularities have been noticed during expansion of telecommunication facilities in Himachal Pradesh;

(b) if so, the details thereof during the last year;

(c) the number of contractors awarded contracts in Himachal Pradesh; and

(d) the total amount spent on laying of telephone cables during the above period?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Some irregularities in laying of optical fibre cables at lesser depth than specified have been noticed during Departmental inspection in certain segments of 14 route lengths.

(c) A total of 226 contractors were awarded the cable laying contracts.

(d) A total of Rs. 666.17 lakhs was spent on these works during the last year.

[English]

Alliance Air Subsidiary of IA

2166. SHRI P.R. DASMUNSI: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state: